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The Chinese Discovery of the Sanskrit Script

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1. Introduction

Two persons appear to have played a crucial role in the Chinese discovery of the Sanskrit script. One is Fa Hsien, the famous Chinese monk who travelled to India and had a first hand view of a society based solely on phonetic script. The other is Sha Rei Un, a famous poet and the first Chinese to write on the Sanskrit letters. What attracted Sha Rei Un to the phonetic Sanskrit script and what knowledge did he acquire of the script will be discussed in this paper.

The Japanese readings of the proper nouns have been given here excepting for such well-known persons like Fa Hsien and places like Changan. The Chinese readings of the dynastic names have been retained.

2. Life and Time of Fa Hsien and Sha Rei Un

2.1. Socio-Political Environment

Fa Hsien 法顯 and Sha Rei Un 謝靈運 lived at a time when the socio-political control was in the hands of the aristocratic class known by the name Shitaifu 士大夫. They were originally single term officials recruited through examination during the Han 漢 period (B.C. 206-A.D. 220). They made their posts hereditary, and

after the fall of the Han authority fought with each other for grabbing political power. The new ruling class valued education highly and Buddhism had many adherents among them. Talented Chinese outside the powerful families had no future in the government, the primary channel for attaining social recognition in those days, established by the warlords. For them the monastic order, which had developed into a huge institution, provided an alternative avenue for gaining social recognition. In addition, it offered personal safety to a great extent in those troubled days. Monk Do An 道安 (A.D. 312-385) provides a good example of the fame and status attained by some of the monks. After capturing Joyo 襄陽, an important city, with a force of one hundred thousand, the Former Ch'in 前秦 ruler Fu Ken 苻堅 said that all he got was a man and a half. When someone asked him who they were, the ruler replied that the full man was Do An and the half man was Shu Saku Shi 習鑿齒, a famous literary figure.⁽¹⁾

2.2. Brief Life Sketch

Life of Fa Hsien (c. A.D. 339-422) will be given here in brief since it is very well-known. He became a member of the monastic order at the age of twenty. In the year A.D. 399 he set out for India from Changan at the age of sixty along with a number of fellow monks. He returned alone at the age of seventy-two in A.D. 412 via Ceylon and Java. He translated Mahaparinirvana Sutra and other texts together with Monk Buddhahadra of the Dhyana School at Dojoji Temple. He died at the age of eighty-two. Sha Rei Un (A.D. 385-433) was a scion of the powerful Sha family which was a strong adherent of Buddhism. In A.D. 383, one of his great granduncles Sha An 謝安 led the Eastern Chin 東晉 forces to victory in war against the Former Ch'in ruler Fu Ken. His own grandfather Sha Gen 謝玄 was a deputy commander in this war. Sha An erected the Dojoji Temple 道場寺, mentioned in the preceding paragraph, in Changan which developed into a haven of Buddhist monks and an important translation centre.⁽²⁾

Sha Rei Un was a leading poet of his time. He entered government service in the year A.D. 405. With a weak ruler on the throne, rivalry broke out between two contenders. Sha Rei Un was serving under the contender who lost in the power struggle and committed suicide. The victor spared Sha Rei Un, but relegated him to a minor position. Sha Rei Un resigned his job because the new ruler did not recognise his talent and plunged into literary activities. Presently Emperor Bun 文帝 (A.D. 424-454), an admirer of his poems, ascended the throne, recalled Sha Rei Un and appointed him a private secretary. The emperor admired his literary genius but not his political acumen. He resigned again out of frustration and withdrew into literary activities once more. He was put to death on charge of treason in A.D. 433.⁽³⁾

The flower garden of the Deer Park, I yearn for
The famous mountain of Vulture Peak, I adore
The virgin forest of Sala Trees, I long for
And I pine for the fragrant trees of the Mango Grove.
Beautiful, yet beyond reach, are they,
Where pervades the compassionate voice of the Buddha.⁽⁴⁾

This poem of Sha Rei Un quoted in his biography in Soshō 宋書, the History of the Sung Dynasty (A.D. 420-479), gives a fair idea of his strong commitment to Buddhism. In the eulogy written after the death of Monk E On 慧遠 around A.D. 417, Sha Rei Un states that he wanted to become the monk's disciple at the age of fifteen, but his wish was not fulfilled. He, however, remained an ardent admirer of the monk who is regarded as the founder of the Pure Land School. Around the year 386, E On founded a monastery in Rozan mountain 廬山 which became an important centre of Buddhist activities. Coming to know from Fa Hsien that there was a shadow of Buddha in Northern India, E On wanted to have one in Rozan. Around A.D. 413, he employed carvers for the purpose, and requested Sha Rei Un to write

the legend for the shadow. ⁽⁵⁾

3. Factors Drawing Sha Rei Un to Sanskrit

There were two areas that tormented the missionaries from the very beginning. One was translation of Buddhist texts, and the other was transcription of Buddhist terms which conveyed totally new concepts to the Chinese. Translation and transcription, perhaps, were two major factors that roused Sha Rei Un's curiosity about Sanskrit.

3.1. Translation of Scriptures

The Buddhist missionaries in China attached great importance to translation of scriptures from the very beginning. Judging from the available information, the first translator was An Se Ko 安世高, a monk from Perthia, who translated thirty-four texts between A.D. 147 and 167. Shutsusanzokishu 出三藏記集 of Monk So Yu 僧祐 (c. A.D. 445-518) is one of the oldest sources of information on early monastic activities in China. Chapter Two of this work gives a list and number of translations made by different translators up to A.D. 495. The list carries the names of sixty-six translators and three hundred and twenty-five translations. Two hundred and seventy-two translations were made up to Fa Hsien's time. Many texts like the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, however, had multiple translations.

Benshoron 辯正論 of Monk Ho Rin 法琳 (A.D. 572-640), on the other hand, gives a slightly different statistics. It contains a record of translations made since the Western Chin period along with the number of temples and clerics. ⁽⁶⁾ These have been shown in Table 1 below. This record gives only a partial information since translations were also made in areas beyond the boundaries of these kingdoms.

Table 1 : Early translation activities in China

Dynasty	No. of temples	No. of monks and nuns	No. of translators	No. of translations
Western Chin 西晉 (A. D. 265-316)	180	3,700	13	73
Eastern Chin 東晉 (A. D. 317-420)	1,768	24,000	27	263
Sung 宋 (A. D. 420-479)	1,931	36,000	23	210
C'hi 齊 (A. D. 479-502)	2,015	32,500	16	72
Liang 梁 (A. D. 502-557)	2,846	82,700	42	238
Ch'en 陳 (A. D. 557-589)	1,232	32,000	3	11
Northern Wei 北魏 (A. D. 386-534)	30,000	200,000	19	49
Sui 隋 (A. D. 581-618)	3,985	236,200	26	82

The data for Northern Ch'i 北齊 (A. D. 550-577) and Northern Chou 北周 (A. D. 557-581) dynasties are also given, but they are fragmentary. The former had 43 imperial temples, 6 translators and 14 translations. The latter had 931 temples, 4 translators and 16 translations.

Many scholarly Chinese collaborated with the missionaries in their translation work. For instance, in Shutsusanzokishu, the biography of Dharmaraksha, who came to China around A. D. 270, says that his translation of Chonichimyokyo 超日明經 was full of repetitions. A Chinese monk Jo Sho En 聶承遠 corrected the translation. Jo Sho En corrected other translations of Dharmaraksha also. But the eminent Chinese monks who worked hard for spreading the religion were not translators. They depended on translations to explain the basic tenets of the new religion to people. But many translations were far from satisfactory. Shutsusanzokishu mentioned above refers to mistakes in translations from the very beginning. In the biography

of An Se Ko it says that translations made before and after him were full of mistakes. However, there were few mistakes in his translations. Kumarajiva, who came to Changan in A.D. 401, is considered to be one of the finest translators of Buddhist texts. His biography says that the translations made by the Scythian and Indian monks had many problems... The meanings in the old translations were wrong because the translators lost the meanings of the original texts. So the translations deviated from the originals. ⁽⁷⁾

3.2. Transcription of Buddhist Words

Buddhism introduced many new concepts to the Chinese. Many could not be translated, and hence were transcribed. The biographies in Shutsusanzokishu refer to transcriptions quite often. For instance, the biography of Monk Ho Un 宝雲 (died A.D. 449) says that he went to India where he studied Indian letters and their sounds. He transcribed the words correctly. Kumarajiva's transcriptions have also been mentioned as good. ⁽⁸⁾ Such references testify the big problem the monks faced in transcribing Buddhist terms with Chinese characters. Mantras were slowly gaining popularity among the monks in the days of Sha Rei Un. They were popularly believed to produce supernatural effects when pronounced correctly. So their correct transcription became important. The earliest ones date back to around A.D. 286. Kumarajiva and Buddhahadra gave forty-two monosyllabic mantras in transcription in their translations. Each mantra carried a short religious interpretation. Buddhahadra's mantras included many compound consonantal sounds like **rta**, **ska** and **sta**. ⁽⁹⁾ He must have realized that it was impossible to transcribe them correctly in Chinese. Knowing Sanskrit very well, Fa Hsien also must have been aware of the problem.

3.3. Do Sho's Controversy

It would not be wrong to assume that the mistaken translations raised a lot of

controversy in the scholarly monastic community. The most important controversy over translation relevant to this paper was the one raised by Monk Do Sho 道生, a contemporary of Fa Hsien and Sha Rei Un. He was thoroughly dissatisfied with the quality of translations and said that after the scriptures came to the East, the translators often deviated from the real meaning. He disputed the interpretation Fa Hsien and Buddhahadra made on attaining Buddhahood in their translation of Mahaparinirvana Sutra. The translation said that those committed to evil lacked Buddha nature and hence were not eligible for attaining Buddhahood. Do Sho contended that even these villains possessed Buddha nature and hence could attain Buddhahood. He was ostracised by the monastic community for his view. He came and settled down in Rozan. An Indian monk Mu Shin 無識 made another translation of the same sutra a few years later, and it was clearly stated there that even the utmost villains possessed Buddha nature and consequently could attain Buddhahood. The contention of Do Sho was vindicated. ⁽¹⁰⁾

4. Revision of Mahaparinirvana Sutra

Sha Rei Un was a great admirer of Do Sho, who advocated the doctrine of sudden enlightenment. Sha Rei Un wrote Ben Shu Ron 辯宗論 where he gave the important points of this doctrine. It is difficult to imagine Sha Rei Un remaining unaware of Do Sho's controversy that challenged such a paramount figure like Fa Hsien. Mu Shin's translation must have attracted much attention in the Rozan community after it vindicated Do Sho's stand. Ryokosoden 梁高僧伝, the second biography of Buddhist monks after Shutsusanzokishu written by E Ko 慧皎 (A. D. 479-554), says that the language of Mu Shin's translation was good but chapterisation was crude. So it was difficult for a beginner to commit the sutra to memory. E Gon 慧嚴 along with E Kan 慧觀 and Sha Rei Un revised the translation. They changed the language in many places. But of greater importance is the substitution of Mu Shin's chapter-

isation with that of Fa Hsien and Buddhabhadra.⁽¹¹⁾

The translation of Fa Hsien and Buddhabhadra contains eighteen chapters divided into six volumes. The fourteenth chapter of this work is devoted to the Sanskrit letters. Mu Shin translated a more detailed version of the sutra. The translation consists of thirteen chapters divided into 40 volumes, with the Sanskrit letters forming a part of the fourth chapter. The first five chapters of Mu Shin's work contain the entire translation of Fa Hsien. While revising, Sha Rei Un and his friends combined the sections corresponding to Fa Hsien's preface and the first chapter into one and made it the preface of the revised text. What remained of the five chapters was rearranged into sixteen chapters to agree with Fa Hsien's chapterisation. Thus the Sanskrit letters became the thirteenth chapter in the revised version. Both the translations give the letters along with their religious interpretations. The interpretations in the two texts differ mutually. The traditional Varnamala table itself has not been reproduced. It may be mentioned here that Fa Hsien and Buddhabhadra's translation is the oldest Chinese work extant to carry the whole list of Sanskrit letters.

The revisers also replaced some of Mu Shin's transcriptions with those of Fa Hsien. Of special interest are the transcriptions of the voiced aspirated letters **gha**, **jha**, **ḡha**, **dha** and **bha**. The characters used by Mu Shin had, in all likelihood, nasal endings. This was not the case with Fa Hsien's transcriptions, which were adopted by the revisers. For instance, Mushin transcribed the letter **dha** with the character 彈 read, at present, as /tan/ or /t'an/ in Chinese and /dan/ in Japanese. Fa Hsien and Buddhabhadra transcribed it with 陀 read as /tuo/ in Chinese and /da/ in Japanese.

5. Sanskrit Letters in Mahaparinirvana Sutra

The section on Sanskrit letters in Mahaparinirvana Sutra opens with Bodhisattva Kashyapa requesting the Buddha to explain the letters. The main focus of the Buddha is on religious interpretation, and hence very little linguistic information is given

here. Of the three versions available, the information given in Mu Shin's version will be seen here.⁽¹²⁾ This is because Sanskritic studies in Japan have, for some unknown reason, persistently ignored the Fa Hsien's version. In reply to Bodhisattva Kashyapa's request to explain the basic concept of letters, the Buddha says that he will explain the half letters as they constitute the basic concept. They hold together various written things, sorcery, sentences, all elements and realities. Common people learn the base of letters, and only after that they know what is dharma and what is not. Next, the Buddha says that there are fourteen sounds. They are called the meanings of letters. The letters have another name nirvana. They are static. So they do not flow. The things that do not flow do not get exhausted. The things that do not get exhausted constitute the adamant body of the Tathagata. These fourteen letters are the source of the letters. Following this, the letters are given along with their religious interpretations. First, the twelve vowels, **a**, **ā**, **i**, **ī**, **u**, **ū**, **e**, **ai**, **o**, **au**, **aṁ** and **aḥ** are given, followed by the consonants **ka**, **kha**, **ga**, **gha**, **ṇa**, **ca**, **cha**, **ja**, **jha**, **ṇa**, **ṭa**, **ṭha**, **ḍa**, **ḍha**, **ṇa**, **ta**, **tha**, **da**, **dha**, **na**, **pa**, **pha**, **ba**, **bha**, **ma**, **ya**, **ra**, **la**, **va**, **śa**, **ṣa**, **sa**, **ha** and **kṣa**. Finally, the four vowels **ṛ**, **ṛī**, **ḷ** and **ḷī** are given. There is a linguistic information here, which is given in the version of Fa Hsien and the revised version of Sha Rei Un and his friends, but not in that of Mu Shin. It is that the letters **gha**, **jha**, **ḍha**, **dha** and **bha** are heavy sounds, a term used in Chinese linguistics for the aspirated sounds.

Some of the religious interpretations given with the letters are long and some are short. For instance, the first letter **a** has a long interpretation as follows. The letter **a** is indestructible. So the indestructible thing is called the Three Treasures, for instance like diamond. Again, it is named so because it does not flow away. The thing that does not flow away is the Tathagata... The letter **ja**, on the other hand, has a short interpretation. It says that the letter **ja** means true salvation. So there is no senility. Hence it has been named **ja**. Even shorter is the interpretation of the letter **ba**. The letter **ba** is named after the ten powers of the Buddha. So it is called **ba**.

The letters are followed by some linguistic information. The inhaling breath turns into sound when the root of tongue is assisted by nose. There are long sounds, short sounds and superseding sounds, and we understand the meaning from these sounds. All differ from each other through the interference of tongue or teeth. There is also reference to half-letter *hanji* 半字 and full-letter *manji* 滿字. They carry only religious interpretations and no linguistic information. For instance, the half-letters constitute the basis of the scriptures, discussions and other writings. The meanings of the half-letters are at the root of all sufferings. Hence they are called half-letters, Full letters are the roots of all good laws and speech.

6. Sha Rei Un on Sanskrit

A fairly large number of highly educated Chinese were exposed to Sanskrit by the time of Sha Rei Un. Fa Hsien returned home after spending twelve years in Sanskrit environment. Rozan, in the days of Sha Rei Un, had a large community of native monks, some of whom had visited Central Asia and India. Buddhayasas, Buddhahadra, Samghadeva and other foreign monks also resided here from time to time. Situation was favourable for the inquisitive to collect information on Sanskrit.

6.1. Encounter with Sanskrit

It can be easily imagined that revision of Mahaparinirvana Sutra motivated Sha Rei Un to have a closer look at the phonetic Sanskrit letters. Both Chinese and foreign monks were readily available at Rozan to help him. A monk he consulted was E Ei 慧叡, an India returnee resident. E Ei was well versed in transcription of Sanskrit words and local variations in the meanings of words. E Ei's biography says that Sha Rei Un of Chin county 陳郡 loved Buddhist theology very much. He was well versed in the sounds of different peoples. He asked E Ei about the different meanings of letters in scriptures and various sounds. He wrote Jushi Onkunjo 十四音訓

叙 where he gave the rules of Sanskrit and Chinese thus making it easy to understand. ⁽¹³⁾

6.2. The Varnamala

Sha Rei Un's Jushi Onkunjo is lost, but quotations from it have been preserved in Shittanzo 悉曇藏 of Annen 安然, a Japanese monk of the tenth century. It is one of the most valuable sources of information on Sanskrit in the Far East up to his time. One strange fact in Annen's work is that it has quoted the Varnamala from different sources including Mu Shin and Sha Rei Un, but not Fa Hsien. Annen has quoted Sha Rei Un's writing on the Sanskrit letters from Gengiki 玄義記 of Monk E Kin 恵均. The Varnamala has been shown in Table 2 as it will help in understanding Sha Rei Un. Monk E Kin writes as follows.

Table 2 : Varnamala

a) Vowels

a ā i ī u ū r ṛ | |
e ai o au aṁ aḥ

b) Consonants

i) Plosives

Orals				Nasals	
Unvoiced		Voiced			
Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated		
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa	Velars
ca	cha	ja	jha	ña	Palatals
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa	Retroflexes
ta	tha	da	dha	na	Dentals
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	Labials

ii) Non-plosives

ya ra la va śa ṣa sa ha kṣa

Sha Rei Un of Sung Kingdom says that there are fifty letters in Mahaparinirvana Sutra. They are the sources of all the letters. They combine with each other and constitute the letters of spelling. Twelve of these letters have pairs whose sounds are close to each other. Although close, they have different significances. Within the first six letters, the earlier ones have short sounds and the later ones have long. In the latter six letters, there is no difference of short and long. However, the last two letters of the latter group are the echoes of two letters of the first group. Again, four letters are not used commonly. So they form a separate group and are placed after all the letters. In the thirty-four letters, there are twenty-five in which sound comes from inside and rolls out through the lips. In the nine letters, the sound comes from outside and goes inside. In the five letters, the fourth letter and the third letter are the same, but with slight difference of lightness and heaviness. The small letters are called *hanji* or half-letters. These twelve letters, for instance, are like our words. The thirty-four letters, for instance, are like our sounds. They attach to words to form various types of characters. It is like two letters combining together to form *manji* or full-letters. Sound borrows the body of letter to express itself in the West. I will write the letters of the West separately.

Following this, there is a note saying that the Sanskrit letters have been added and their pronunciations have been given. This note suggests that Sha Rei Un gave just the letters in Chinese transcription, and the Sanskrit letters and their pronunciations were added later. Linguistic remarks like short sound, long sound and voiced sound were also added to the letters. These additions made later will be skipped here as they do not fall within the scope of this study. As stated above, Sha Rei Un gives the letters in transcription. The letters and the notes on them given by him are shown below.

(i) **a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, ai, o, au** : In these ten letters there are pairs with sounds close to each other.

(ii) **aṁ, aḥ** : These two letters are the echoes of the letters **a** and **ā**. Without

them, the rhythm of the letters will not be complete. So the letters are ended with these two letters. By adding these two letters to the earlier ten, we get twelve letters.

(iii) **ka, kha, ga, gha, ṇa** : These five letters are tongue root sounds.

(iv) **ca, cha, ja, jha, ña**: These five letters are within-the-tongue sounds. They are also called molar teeth vicinity sounds.

(v) **ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa** : These five letters are close to tongue tip sounds.

(vi) **ta, tha, da, dha, na**: These five letters are called tongue tip sounds. They are also called tongue top sounds.

(vii) **pa, pha, ba, bha, ma**: These five letters are called within-the-lips sounds. They are also called sounds transmitted from lips.

(viii) **ya, ra, la, va, śa, ṣa, sa, ha** and **kṣa** : These nine letters are behind the lips sounds which reach up to the tip of tongue.

These make thirty-four letters. The four letters **ṛ, ṝ, ḷ** and **ḹ** do not belong to the thirty-four letters given above. They are rarely used. They are given separately in the end. Thus there are fifty letters in all. ⁽¹⁴⁾

It may be mentioned here that although Sha Rei Un replaced many of Mu Shin's transcriptions with those of Fa Hsien while revising, yet he retained by and large Mu Shin's transcriptions in his own work.

6.3. Fourteen Letters, Half-Letters and Full-Letters

The Buddha's remark in the beginning of his discourse that there are fourteen sounds appears to have produced a lot of controversy among the Chinese. This is because, there will be sixteen sounds if the four vowels **ṛ, ṝ, ḷ** and **ḹ** given in the end are added to the twelve appearing in the beginning. E Kin continues as follows: The last four letters **ṛ, ṝ, ḷ** and **ḹ** are added to these. Thus they make sixteen letters. Why does it say fourteen letters? Sha Rei Un explains that the letters **arṇ** and **aḥ** of the former are not true sounds. They are just the spill overs of sound. So they should

not be taken into account. Thus, there are only ten letters in the former group, and to these the latter four are added. Therefore, they make fourteen in all. Question : If the latter four letters are added to these, then why were they not explained together? Why were the four letters explained separately later on? Sha Rei Un's explanation says that the four letters coming in the end are used rarely. So they were explained separately.⁽¹⁵⁾

Sha Rei Un has written briefly about half-letters and full-letters. He got the information from Monk E Kan, who was one of his colleagues in revising the Mahaparinirvana Sutra. He writes that in sounds, there is half-sound. When sounds of letters are joined together, they are called full. The sounds are half-letters. When half-sound letters are joined together they form full-letters. In sounds, half sound forms the basis. In letters, half-letter is naturally the basis. Unlike the usual practice, letters are derived from sound. Sound is the basis in China. Sound is not derived from letter. Therefore, letter does not constitute the basis here.⁽¹⁶⁾

6.4. Other Information

Sha Rei Un has also written on the problems involving translation as follows : In the scriptures, the contextual explanation of the western letters could not be done correctly. Wherever they ran into trouble, they remained incomprehensible for a long time. Now, if one knows the western language and does not know our language, he won't be able to explain. So, even if one knows the meanings of the western words, if he does not know our language, he won't be able to explain properly. If one knows the languages of two countries, and knows the meanings of the languages of two countries, then he will be able to translate the meaning and understand the scriptures well. So when Monk E Ei formerly studied the meaning of scriptures, he went to South India, stayed there for many years and picked up the language of the West very well. Now, I am correcting the sounds and meanings of the two countries and interpreting the western letters in the scriptures. Those who want to study will not

be held up any more... In western letters, one sound cannot produce a word. It does not produce a word. It cannot produce the name of a thing. It is necessary to add letters, and only then the names of things are obtained. Without adding other letters word will not be formed. Different letters are joined together to form words. In our country, the words may have the same name, but their characters are different. Even if different characters use the same name, we can get their meaning. We get the meaning because it is like asking for *fu* 斧 (axe) of *fukyo* 斧鋸 (axe and saw) while doing some carpentry work. There is no mistake because the meaning is understood from the word. In the case of characters, each has a different shape. The western letters do not have such meaning. In all the letters, there are no two letters with the same sound. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Sha Rei Un has also touched upon the Kharosthi script, which was used widely in North-West India and Central Asia. He says that there is a western script called Kharosthi, and that it was made by a holy man named Kharostha from the Brahmi letters. ⁽¹⁸⁾

7. Study

Translation and transcription, as stated above, were two likely factors that evoked Sha Rei Un's interest in Sanskrit. There was also a powerful native factor. Right at this time the Chinese were struggling with the problem of recording the reading of their characters. The reading of the characters varied from region to region and also with the passing of time. A method called *hansetsu* 反切 to record the reading of the characters had evolved through trial and error, and it was slowly gaining popularity. However, it retained the basic syllabic character and could not be used freely for phonetic transcription. ⁽¹⁹⁾ It is likely that these three factors induced Sha Rei Un to have a closer look at the newly introduced phonetic script.

Fa Hsien and Mu Shin saw the Sanskrit letters from the religious angle. Sha Rei

Un no doubt saw it from the academic angle. He was a poet. In Chinese poems, rhyming was a very important factor. Now, the reading of the Chinese characters changed with time and place. So, the prospect of two characters rhyming in one linguistic area but not in another was there. In such a situation, a poem written in an area stood the danger of losing its appeal in another. So a form of writing where the phonetic value of letters remained unchanged would naturally rouse curiosity in a person beset with such problem. Sha Rei Un came across the Sanskrit letters in such a situation.

Now, Sha Rei Un had around him a number of Chinese who had first hand contact with phonetic script in India and Central Asia. From them he gathered that books in the West were written in phonetic Sanskrit script. The script was used by both monks and common people.⁽²⁰⁾ He also must have found out from them and the foreign visitors that the phonetic value of these letters did not change with time and place. This universality of the script is likely to have impressed him and motivated him to have a closer look at it. Although Fa Hsien was better qualified to write about the script, he never did. It was sheer academic interest that pursued Sha Rei Un to write Jushi Onkunjo in order to enlighten the Chinese academic world on the message carried by the script.

Unfortunately, Jushi Onkunjo exists no more. However, extracts from it quoted in Shittanzo give some idea of the knowledge he had of the letters. He knew that the letters were divided into two basic groups, vowels and consonants. He also knew that the first six vowels were constituted by three short and three long vowels. Fa Hsien, Buddhahadra and Mu Shin must have had problem in convincing the Chinese that the letters ṛ, ṝ, ḷ and ḹ were vowels. So they put these letters in the end. Sha Rei Un must have inquired about them and the Indian monks apparently came out with an explanation that they were used rarely, and hence lumped together in the end. It seems the Indians also suggested that the letters **arṇ** and **aḥ** were echoes of the letters **a** and **ā** and as such special additions, in order to justify the fourteen

sounds mentioned in the Buddha's discourse. The letters **am̐** and **ah̐** indeed have close physical resemblance with **a** and **ā**. These explanations seem to have convinced him, since he says that the four vowels **r̥, r̄, l̥** and **l̄** plus the first ten vowels, excluding **am̐** and **ah̐**, constitute the fourteen sounds.

Sha Rei Un knew that the consonants came in two groups, the plosive group made up of twenty-five letters and the non-plosive group consisting of nine letters. The 'five letters' mentioned by him refer to the twenty-five plosive consonants which come in five groups of velars, etc., each group consisting of five letters. His definition of the groups differs somewhat from that used in traditional Indian grammar. In Sanskrit, both the unvoiced and voiced letters have unaspirated and aspirated forms. Sha Rei Un has used the terms light and heavy, which stand for unaspirated and aspirated forms in Chinese phonetics, only with the voiced letters, and that also in reverse order. This suggests that Chinese of his time had unaspirated-aspirated distinction in unvoiced sounds but not in voiced sounds. The Chinese, therefore, had no problem with the unvoiced letters. The problem was with the voiced letters. So, while revising Mu Shin, he added the note to caution about the unaspirated-aspirated distinction in the voiced letters. He also touched upon the mechanism involved in the production of plosive and non-plosive sounds, exhaling in the case of plosive sounds and inhaling in the case of non-plosive sounds.

Sha Rei Un has mentioned half-letters and full-letters but has not discussed them much. By half-letters he may have meant the vocalic signs and consonantal ligatures, and by full-letters he may have meant the compound consonants and the combination of vocalic signs with the consonants. It is difficult to come to any conclusion from the meagre information. He knew that the letters carried phonetical values and that a number of them joined together to form a word. Religious meanings attached to the letters could have inhibited him from assuming that the letters possessed only phonetical values and nothing else.

Before ending, a word must be said about Mu Shin's transcription of the voiced

aspirated sounds **gha**, **jha**, **ḍha**, **dha** and **bha**. He transcribed them with characters having nasal endings. There may be two explanations for this. One is that although they had nasal endings in the southern linguistic area located round Nanking where Sha Rei Un lived, they were non-nasal in Ryoshu 涼州 in far north-west beyond Changan where Mu Shin carried out his translation. The other is that Mu Shin chose the characters with nasal ending deliberately in order to tell the readers that they were aspirated sounds. Sha Rei Un and his friends replaced these transcriptions with the non-nasal ending characters of Fa Hsien together with the note that they were aspirated.

8. Concluding Remarks

Sha Rei Un was the first Chinese scholar to take note of the importance of phonetic Sanskrit script and the phonetical ideas carried by them. The surviving fragments of his work show that he had some understanding of the basic difference between vowels and consonants, plosive and non-plosive letters, and non-aspiration and aspiration in voiced consonants. He had some idea of the mechanism involved in production of sounds as proposed in Sanskrit. He knew vaguely that a letter represented a sound and not a word like the Chinese characters. A number of letters joined together to form a word. It seems that he had some idea of vocalic combination of consonants and mechanism of formation of compound consonant letters. He introduced these new phonetical ideas into Chinese linguistic studies.

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- (2) Shutsusanzokishu, pp. 416,241)
- (3) Morino, Shigeo : Sha Rei Un ni tsuite, Chugokugakuronshu, Yasuda Joshi Daigaku Chugoku Bungaku Kenkyukai, Hiroshima, 1993, pp. 1-14, 森野茂夫, 謝靈運について, 中国学論集, 安田女子大学中国文学研究会
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- A translation of the biography of Sha Rei Un appearing in Soshō, the official history of the Sung Dynasty, is given here along with the Chinese original. Sha Rei Un has referred to the following Buddhist sites in his poem.
- Dear Park : The Mrigadava Park Vulture Peak : Gridhrakuta
Forest of Sala Trees : The place of the Buddha's nirvana
Mango Grove : The Garden of Amrapali
- Translated and quoted with kind permission of Prof. Morino.
- (5) Do Sen, Jap. Tr. Ota, Teizo : Kogumyoshu 3, Kokuyaku Issaikyo Wakan Senjutsubu, Gokyobu 3, Daito Shuppansha, Tokyo, 1979, p. 161, 道宣著 太田悌蔵訳, 広弘明集 下, 国訳一切経和漢選述部, 護教部三 (Do Sen : A. D. 596-657)
Shutsusanzokishu p. 419
- (6) Ho Rin : Benshoron, Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo, V. 52, pp. 502-509, 法琳著辯正論, 大正新修大藏經
- (7) Shutsusanzokishu, pp. 359-362, pp. 383-390)
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- (9) Mabuchi, Kazuo: Zotei Nihon Ingakuno Kenkyu, V. 1, Rinsen Shoten, Kyoto, 1984, pp. 27-34, 馬渕和夫著 増訂日本韻学史の研究 1, 臨川書店 The letters appear in Kumarajiva's Prajnaparamita Sutra in p. 256, V. 8 ; and in Buddhahadra's Buddhavatamsaka Mahavaipulya Sutra in pp. 765-766, V. 9 of Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo.
- (10) Shutsusanzokishu, pp. 423-425
Kenneth Ch'en : Buddhism in China, a Historical Survey, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1973, pp. 115-16)
- (11) E Ko, Tr. Tokiwa, Daijo : Ryokosoden, Kokuyaku Issaikyo Wakan Senjutsubu, Shidenbu 7, Daito Shuppansha, Tokyo, 1979, pp. 155, 157-158, 慧皎著 常盤大定訳 梁高僧伝, 国訳一切経和漢選述部, 史伝部七
- (12) The versions of Mu Shin and Fa Hsien and Buddhahadra and the revised version of Sha Rei Un and his friends are given in pp. 413-414, pp. 887-889 and pp. 653-655 re-

spectively of Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo, V. 12, 大正新修大藏經

The Japanese translation of Mu Shin's version by Tokiwa Daijo titled Daihatsu Nehangyo forms a part of the series Kokuyaku Issaikyo Indo Senjutsubu published by Daito Shuppansha, Tokyo, 1970. The Sanskrit letters appear in pp. 179-85 of Volume 1;

無識著 常盤大定訳 大般涅槃經 1, 国訳一切經印度選述部, 大東出版社

An English translation of the revised version of Sha Rei Un and his friends by Kosho Yamamoto titled The Mahaparinirvana-sutra, published by Karin Bunko, Ube, Japan, 1973-75, exists. The letters are given in pp. 201-207.

(13) Ryokosoden, p. 155

(14) Annen : Shittanzo, Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo, V. 84, p. 409M-410T 安然著 悉曇藏, 大正新修大藏經

(15) Shittanzo, p. 377M-B

(16) Shittanzo, p. 432M

(17) Shittanzo, p. 371B

During Sha Rei Un's time the four tones were not established. So Chinese had a large number of homonyms. The example given by Sha Rei Un can be understood easily from the English homonyms 'right' and 'write'. For instant, an instructor in a military school tells his cadets standing in attention : "Right". Some cadets turn 'right' and others start taking out pencil and note book from bag to 'write'. The instructor yells : "Hey, 'right' of 'left-right' and not 'read and write'. Be careful!" Just as the spellings of 'right' and 'write' differ, the appearance of characters used for Chinese homonyms also differs from each other.

(18) Shittanzo, p. 369T

(19) The *hansetsu* system of recording the readings of the characters was proposed by Son En 孫炎. Here, the reading of a character was given by two characters, the first showing the initial consonant and the second showing remaining part. For instance, the reading of the character 東 /tung/ was given by 德 /te/ and 紅 /hung/. Here, /t-/ of the first character and /-ung/ of the second gave /tung/, the reading of the character in question. The *hansetsu* system did not resolve the second phonetic element further. It was slowly becoming popular during the time of Sha Rei Un. The changes in the readings of characters with time and place involved the *hansetsu* phonetic elements also.

(20) Shittanzo, p. 369T

Chinese characters given in the main text :

Annen 安然	E On 慧遠	Rozan 廬山
An Se Ko 安世高	Fa Hsien 法顯	Ryokosoden 梁高僧伝
Benshoron 辯正論	Former Ch'in 前秦	Ryoshu 涼州
Benshuron 辯宗論	<i>fu</i> 斧	Sha An 謝安
Ch'en 陳	Fu Ken 苻堅	Sha Gen 謝玄
C'hi 齊	<i>fukyo</i> 斧鋸	Sha Rei Un 謝靈運
Chin county 陳郡	Gengiki 玄義記	Shitaifu 士大夫
Chonichimyokyo	Han 漢	Shittanzo 悉曇藏
超日明經	<i>hanji</i> 半字	Shu Saku Shi 習鑿齒
da 陀	<i>hansetsu</i> 反切	Shutsusanzokishu
dan 彈	Ho Rin 法琳	出三藏記集
Do An 道安	Ho Un 宝雲	Sosho 宋書
Dojoji 道場寺	Jo Sho En 聶承遠	So Yu 僧祐
Do Sho 道生	Joyo 襄陽	Sui 隋
Eastern Chin 東晉	Jushi Onkunjo 十四音訓叙	Sung 宋
E Ei 慧叡	Liang 梁	tan 彈
E Gon 慧嚴	<i>manji</i> 滿字	t'an 彈
E Kan 慧觀	Mu Shin 無識	t'uo 陀
E Kin 惠均	Northern Ch'i 北齊	Western Chin 西晉
E Ko 慧皎	Northern Chou 北周	
Emperor Bun 文帝	Northern Wei 北魏	